

The street lamps of Ansley Park spill amber light on the shade trees and mansions by Atlanta's Botanical Gardens. On a fourth floor terrace of a high rise condo overlooking the park, red impatiens nestle against the night air.

Charlotte and Manny Rogers' flower beds border polished tiles and are mirrored in French doors opening to the multiplex apartment. Manny, 30, steps onto the terrace as a full moon slips from a pocket of clouds. He crinkles his perspiring nose to halt sliding wire rim eyeglasses, loosens a silk tie, and toasts the moon with a glass of Spanish sherry from the wine closet. Breathing deeply, he surrenders the irritations of his morning at the Rogers' family establishment in the Atlanta Gift Market on Peachtree Street. The downtown gift mecca bustles with buyers and sellers. Everyone demands space for their designs on the top shelf. Manny gets top dollar for Rogers' space.

Here on the balcony, his head drops as he reviews the day. Away drifts the aggravation of placating an irate Peruvian jewelry trader about a showroom billing error. Manny lets go the defeat in haggling with a prized sculptor's rep from Los Angeles. He strokes the evening shadow on his chin, allowing himself a smile for out fencing a pseudo-patrician from Boston, sticking him with the showroom's highest display rates.

But Manny broods over how Daddy Charlton Rogers, with near Swiss timepiece precision, had turned ugly in the hushed showroom, hounding him about discrepancies in the receipts. Today Manny had defended his computer-generated report in a low, calm voice. He only tapped his foot and waited for the old man to pipe down or bust a gut and be done with it.

The new receptionist had cringed as Daddy growled at her to dust a glass case.

Sputtering and thoroughly exercised, the old man pursued Manny to the main hall, and stopped just short of yelling to re-light his cigar on the escalator ride to the lobby.

Charlotte, the civilized link between the two men, was consulting her astrologer, Harmony Rulhs, in Nashville, not scoring their latest round for the curious lunch hour crowd.

Shrugging, Manny now turns from the terrace and breezes past the carousel horse, grand piano, tufted sofas and ruby velvet wing chairs of the living room. He trods heavily through Charlotte's plaid-walled office, and up to the master suite. Manny calms down as he puts on new sweats and running shoes in his walk-in closet, its seasons of dress arrayed for last minute global travel. He pats his trim waist and puts off his hour on the workout room treadmill.

This time stepping onto the bedroom terrace with its office cityscape, Manny watches nine-to-fivers working late in a phalanx of buildings. With Daddy woes and the Rogers' gift shop as his frame of reference, he wonders what pipers the office workers pay.

Manny perks up, noticing the young woman executive is back at work, long legs lifted and high-heeled shoes up on her desk. She taps the computer keyboard in her lap.

So close is the view, Manny rarely bothers with binoculars. He does reach for them when body language signals a drama unfolding, like the man and woman on the third floor, who soon might be embracing against a wall, or on a couch or conference table.

With the mall, offices, condos, restaurants and a hotel facing the offices, he marvels people see themselves as alone. Not much action this Friday night, but Manny spots his Nigerian cleaning man. Headset on, big Philip T. is vacuum-dancing through an office in what must his thirteen-hour day. Judging from his own spotless apartment, Manny

knows Philip is a cleaning dynamo. He reminds Manny of his own enterprising former self, once a Miami bellhop and business major. "No need to be a spectator," declares Charlotte with a huff from the doorway.

"Lady, will you lay across my big brass bed?"

"First, I will soak in my big marble Jacuzzi," she declares, pausing beside him to tug the curling hair on his neck until he both winces and shrugs off his missed afternoon hair appointment.

Manny quickly kisses away the question on his wife's face and rushes to pose his own.

"Did we ask Tonia to deliver her large platter of shrimp and oysters?"

"We did." Charlotte drops a gold pin, necklace and bracelet into a jewelry box. In a nightly ritual, she explores the mirror for signs of gray in her hair. "Plus our favorite canapés, crusty bread and pecan pie."

"Is there a salad?"

"Caesar, ready to go."

"So," said Manny, drawing a gift box from behind the lace-paned screen beside the dressing table. "All we need for Date Night is music and ... this."

"You sweet thing!" Charlotte uncovers a long, peach satin nightgown from folds of tissue and presses it against her cheek. The color suits her honey hair and brown eyes. Frowning, she drops the garment back into the box.

"Harmony said I was in for a surprise... in a car

"No car tonight." Manny turns on an All Romance CD he bought from the piano player who pounds the keys at the base of the gift market escalator.

"A favorite for my Georgia peach."

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Charlotte fidgets out of their bed twice that evening to call to Australian and New Zealand dealers, confirming reserved space during trade shows in glass and art. Fuming at her wheeling and dealing on "date" night, Manny leans against the brass headboard, guessing at the lewd Aussie punch line behind his wife's laugh as it drifts up from her office. The grandfather clock strikes ten. He glances at their wine glasses on the table by the settee, Rogers' heirlooms. As Charlotte slips into bed, Manny's hand traces the contour of a satiny hip..

"We are expected in New York by 9:00, Manana. " says Charlotte, pushing his hand away. Faced with his frown, she adds, "Daddy had us scheduled for a 7:00 a.m. Manhattan power breakfast, but I sweet-talked the client into brunch."

As astrologer Harmony might predict, there is no sweet-talking Manny. His Spanish soul boils at the mention of Daddy and of his own odd given name. Turning away, he broods over his parent's little joke, naming him Manana Nieve or Tomorrow Snow.

The name had brought too many laughs at his expense - from the family's auto repair garage in Puerto Rico to night classes at a Florida business college. The name led to more ribbing when he hustled for guests at a Miami hotel. "We have to wait around for Tomorrow?"

That is where Manny had his fateful encounter with Charlotte. She had been standing on a chair in lavender high heels and matching linen suit at a sales career fair booth, fixing Rogers & Company's sign. She read Manny's helping hand, guessed his Virgo sign, and never let go. Charlotte had better plans for the young man than being the butt of a joke. She saw to it the resume he left for her family's Atlanta firm would be among the last

documents to read “Manana Nieve.” It annoys her to this day that he had not changed it legally, and customs officials on their travels halt them to confirm, "Tomorrow Snow?" Given the Rogers' name firmly established in Atlanta commerce, Manny barely considered depriving Charlotte and himself of its power when they eloped. As far as Daddy was concerned, Charlotte had seized upon the dark, handsome Manny like her first pony. With any luck, Manny would learn her routine over time. Harmony Ruhl told Charlotte she saw it in the stars.

Restless tonight, Manny stands again in his sweats on the master bedroom terrace, peering over wisps of ground fog. Though it is almost eleven, his new favorite woman executive is still at her computer, no doubt making up for her lost afternoon. He remembers every minute of it.

After suffering Daddy Rogers' cigar fumes and sputtering tantrum, it had been a relief to flee the shop and engage in a conversation with the mystery woman at a mall magazine rack. It was natural to drift together into a hotel lobby. Manny reasoned a harmless afternoon of drinks and banter in the cocktail lounge was exactly what he needed to get his head on straight. The woman, flattered when he confessed to terrace sightings, hinted at lunch sometime. As he now watches that woman putting on a jacket to leave her office, he glances in at the sleeping Charlotte.

Manny bolts from the apartment, descending four levels of the stairwell to the garage, and jogging across the street. Pursued by second thoughts, he taps his sneakered foot, waiting. The woman lets herself out of the building. But Manny is stunned to hear the engine of a '76 Bronco sputter to life in the fog. He peers toward the alley through his misting glasses as a man's voice growls "Get in the car!"

"Let me go!" a woman pleads back.

"Shouldn't we help her?" asks his mystery friend.

Uneasy, Manny nods. "I'll call the police."

"Wait!"

"Can't wait," he calls over his shoulder. "Get yourself out of here."

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But for cups of black coffee downed between air pockets and potholes, the Rogers' cloudy morning flight to LaGuardia and limo ride to the St. Moritz Hotel on Manhattan's Central Park South are uneventful. Wired, Manny declines a fresh cup in the hotel suite when antique silver merchant Nigel Thomas of Thomas & Thomas, Ltd., London ushers the two of them inside.

Manny glances at the view of the green apron of Central Park and its gray fringe of buildings. His only childhood glimpse of New York had been tinged with joy and fear. Crowded in with an aunt and cousins one Christmas, Tomorrow Snow peered through soot at drug dealers, brownstone and graffiti from the window of an East Harlem tenement. He judges the San Moritz scene more to his liking, almost as good as the twin views from the Atlanta triplex astrologer Harmony had forecast to have better vibes for them than Daddy's downtown place or horse farm.

Manny shakes these thoughts to hear a fragment of the urbane conversation engaging the Brit and animated Southern Belle. The Brit is beguiled by Manny's wife. Manny feels possessive and proud of her. Charlotte, a credit to the family, is luring the merchant's U.S. business with the string of showroom perks. Watching the man uncap an ornate silver pen to sign a contract for prime space, Manny's elation is short-lived. He paces,

uneasy about the phone call he did not make to Atlanta police. The unmistakable ruckus of a Bronco had transported Manny back to sweaty days bent over car engines. The shouting man and woman made him scour a mental file of couples he had seen in the office building, pressed against walls or leather sofas, who might have soured of an affair and been going at each other in the fog.

Manny and Charlotte check into their suite at the Parker Meridien, confirm theater tickets with the concierge, and rush to shop in boutiques along 57th Street and Fifth Avenue. Two women jewelers join them for late afternoon cocktails by the wall of water at Trump Towers. More contracts in hand, he and Charlotte taxi to their hotel to catch the view from the pool and gym on the 43rd floor. They end a theater night at Tavern on the Green.

"To perfection!" Manny toasts tree branches edged with white lights.

Long ago Manny had begun measuring words and actions against perfection. With a night school degree and rich old rebel wife on his heels, he first worked to become a stranger to poverty. Loyal Manny attached himself to Charlotte's right side and against her father. He accepted her clean streak and penchant for the paranormal. She in turn pampered him, attended to their stars, and sometimes stood up for him against her Daddy. For months, the widowed Daddy and Charlotte bickered over her choice of a husband and business partner until their elopement ground down her father to a brief cease-fire. Manny still saw himself sentenced to a trail basis.

"His Spanish better open some Latin designer doors," Daddy had grunted when he handed Charlotte a wedding check.

So, when Daddy pushed him to the wall, Manny dug under or climbed over it. But this

time he toyed with a fantasy of innocent lunches and a night rendezvous. Daddy pushes his buttons too well. And the Nieve family tree lost this branch to the tugs of Manny Rogers, an impeccable young American businessman, ridden and kept with fine feed, bridle and windows on the world.

Landing at Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport after the Manhattan trip, Manny snatches up a newspaper with a headline of a Colony Square business woman killed in an alleyway and a photo of a handcuffed cleaning man, Philip T.

In a taxi, he scans the story, seeing no mention of witnesses. The dead accountant had left nothing out of place in her life to examine but the remnants of a gourmet dinner in her fifth floor office. Police said the powerfully-built Philip was under suspicion as the last man in the building and a foreign student who needed money.

Manny considers the attention Philip lavished on their possessions, flowers he tended, and the fine chocolates and wine he did not touch. He remembers the photo the man drew from his wallet to show two little girls and wife back home, holding palm crosses outside a mission church. Manny, on seeing the cross dangling from the cleaning man's neck, chuckled with Charlotte over a mystery solved - devotional pamphlets left in the kitchen by their own Nigerian missionary.

Manny detects a ring of truth in newspaper quotes by Georgia State College friends who said Philip planned to start a clinic in Nigeria when he graduated, that he cared for tropical plants at the botanical gardens, and was not a likely killer. He spent free time jamming in a band foreign students organized on campus, and had joined those friends the night the accountant died.

Still, police jailed Philip on Saturday without bail after finding the victim's body. She

must have caught the poor foreign student trying to steal. He panicked and killed her, authorities speculated with an open-and-shut-case air.

"Something's bothering you," said Charlotte in the elevator to their apartment. "Do you think I gave that Brit too much space for his pound sterling?"

"You could have charmed the Crown Jewels off him." Manny distractedly ruffles the hair she pinned in a bun. It flows around her shoulders.

"You were pretty good with those jewelers, too," Charlotte nods. "Daddy should be pleased."

"Frankly, my dear.....," he mutters as they leave the elevator.

Manny is grim as they drop their suitcases and boutique shopping bags on the brass bed.

He opens the door to the terrace and stares at the office buildings. The woman executive is not at her computer terminal, feet up, keyboard cradled in her lap. Charlotte unpacks and runs water in the Jacuzzi. Manny hears a new Broadway CD playing for the rooms behind him. He pictures tomorrow's showroom showdown and dreams of running away. Though sorry for the cleaning man's plight, Manny cannot call the police. He figures the desk sergeant taking a statement would want to know what he was doing on the street, and what connection he had to the foreigner. He would ask for his legal name. The next reporter checking the police blotter would notice the name, and maybe fit it into a headline pun, making him the butt of a lame joke. The guard in the apartment lobby might snicker as he walked by

Surely, his wife would hunker down and hound him like Daddy until she got to the bottom of his reckless night run. If he survived that inquisition, her country club rivals would look at him closely, connecting the dots to extra-marital intrigue and humble

heritage.

The Rogers public relations agent might counsel some distance between roaming "Manana Nieve" and the company, and Daddy Charlton would pounce on that bone.

Manny vowed he would never let Charlotte come so close to dumping him. If the story made it past the city on CNN, he also might have to endure heavy sighs from the island, how poor garage business has been, how disappointed his widowed father is in the wealthy son who never called.

Manny is suffocating under the weight of his fear. He calms down by judging any call to the police as pointless. It would not change minds about the murderer being Philip. In the night's swirl of ground fog, could he prove it wasn't Philip and the victim by the Bronco? And it wasn't as if the cleaning man was a friend. Manny had no time for friends except Charlotte.

"Hungry?"

"Always," said Manny, in from the terrace. "Why don't I order up from The Country Place?"

"Oh, try a new Buckhead 800 service," calls out Charlotte, stepping into the bubbles of the huge marble tub. "I heard a waiter arrives in a tuxedo!"<sup>1</sup>

Charlotte is still in her cauldron when Manny opens the door for the dinner carried by a white-gloved and tuxedoed waiter. The somber man follows Manny to the dining level, and spoons lemon chicken and pasta into warming trays on a lacquered sideboard. Alone again, Manny dims the chandelier and steps back to admire the linen, crystal and china he had set, the fresh candles in candelabras ready to light. His mouth waters.

"Charlotte, dinner," Manny calls, opening the terrace door over Ansley Park. In the quiet

of Sunday evening, he is stunned by the sound of an old Bronco engine sputtering to life.

He leans over the terrace ledge, searching the driveway and street.

"I missed the waiter?" pouts Charlotte, entering the dining room in red lounging pajamas.

"Glad you did," mumbles her husband.

"Manny, is there something you want to tell me?"

"Tomorrow, Charlotte Lee Rogers," he said. "Maybe, tomorrow.

Showroom business rises in a crescendo of back office faxes and ringing phones, leaving Manny scant time to contemplate crimes, killers or the damage done between himself and his mystery woman. She works with office blinds shut, no doubt shocked at being left alone in the fog.

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Manny abandons a fantasy life and concentrates on balancing the books. When in Georgia, he channel-surfs past local news coverage, losing track of the murder investigation. This suits Charlotte, who recoils from accounts of violence as a slur against her city. Manny's fortunes rise and fall as he grapples with everyday white collar illegalities. Foreign clients demand double sets of bills. Unimaginative designers seem to browse the showroom with theft of creative ideas up their sleeves. Charlotte sees Manny keep on top of things, and her astrologer advises her that Daddy must back off his sensitive son-in-law's case. A new cleaning man does his polishing and vacuuming, but leaves the terrace flowers to fend for themselves. Manny feels a pang of guilt about Philip when he stoops to water the leggy impatiens. He calls a plant service. The same guilt hits when he escorts Charlotte, smashing in wide-brimmed hat and floral dress, to a fund-raising afternoon tea party at the botanical gardens. The guilt is gone by the time he

shakes hand with artists at a High Museum exhibit.

Manny is settled in his window seat on a flight taking him to clients in Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong when Charlotte says her niece, Brandy Mason of New Orleans, will be using the apartment in their absence.

"Sweet thing, she's showing her portfolio at the Atlanta College of Art," said Charlotte as she yawns. "Won't it be nice if she goes to school so close?"

Manny nods, staring out the window at the clouds below as his wife recites the instructions left for Brandy. "Of course, I told her forget about cooking," said Charlotte, exchanging her leather shoes for flight booties. "What a surprise when she opens the door to the waiter in his tuxedo."

Frowning, Manny strokes his chin, recalling Mardes Gras with a girl who stayed tucked behind her peacock plumed mask, cuddling a kitten at the gated townhouse. He eyes the phone on the plane's cushioned seatback. Nonchalantly, he walks from first class to the back of the plane.

Manny is feeling bolder as the jet heads west, gaining hours as it flew. He has time to call the police to check his hunch. But he again wavers about identifying himself for the record. How quickly could he relay a suspicion about a waiter in the Bronco from a restaurant service? If they got on it right away, would they spring Philip? Guard an innocent girl from what may be 1-800 NOW-U-DIE? He pales to think anything happens to Brandy or the family discovers he could have saved her.

A businesswoman also sought the plane's phone beyond the galley, and yells into the receiver about mistakes in a report she waves in the air. She orders correct copies to be in Sydney. Manny wipes his eyeglasses and studies his reflection in a window, for the

moment above contempt, and aboard a jet bound for the Orient. He pictures himself in new suits he would have tailored there, a black one to wear at Daddy Rogers' inevitable funeral and the reading of his will. Manny places a call to the guard in his apartment lobby.

"Yes, Howard, has my wife's niece come through yet?"

"No sign yet but there is a note from your wife to let her in."

"Listen, Howard," said Manny. "Taxi that little lady to the Ansley Inn when she arrives, and see she gets a nice room. Tell her it's my treat, not to be upset but I want her to have some company during her stay in Atlanta. I'll settle the bill when I come back to town

"Where have you been?" asks Charlotte.

Manny takes a deep breath. "I should probably tell you something."

"I do not want to know," says Charlotte. "Daddy warned me I'd never be enough for you."

"What are you talking about?" whispers Manny, glancing around to see if anyone hears her.

"Two can play the game," said Charlotte. "Men are coming on to me all the time." She drums her manicured nails. "I was stopped by a man in the mall who works across the street from us!"

Turning triumphantly to her husband, "He said he loves to see what I am wearing every morning when I come out on the terrace."

"He what!"

"Been watching me for months... like you may be watching women with your binoculars," she arches her brow in a chilling imitation of Daddy, "And think I do not

know it."

Manny searches the ceiling. "That kind of thing just made me call home, and tell Howard to book Brandy into Ansley Inn, not alone in our apartment."

Charlotte stares at her husband. "That's what you were going to tell me?"

Manny nods. "You are not having an affair with some woman across the street?"

"Charlotte, how could you ask me that?"

She judges his mask of hurt to be real, and leans back. "That's a relief!"

Charlotte takes Manny's hand in hers, and kisses it, as she does after showroom tiffs. The hand stiffens and is withdrawn as she sighs, "Oh well, they deliver at the inn, too."

The Rogers travel in silence.

"What's the first movie they're showing on this plane?" asks Manny, buzzing for the steward. "I'll have that champagne now."

"It was sweet of you to be worried for my Brandy," said Charlotte.

"I am not sweet," said Manny darkly, gulping the champagne. He laughs to himself at his fear and relaxes, guessing a murderer would not attempt to kill someone at a crowded business inn.

Cut out by his mood, Manny's wife flips through the airline magazine.

"Charlotte, someone was murdered across the street from our home."

"A woman, right?" said Charlotte. "You do it, Sugar?"

"Did you know our old cleaning man was a suspect?"

"Sure, cause Howard had a petition in the lobby for Philip, and I signed it for both of us," she nodded. "He's gone back to Nigeria."

A movie drones in the cabin but Manny only sees Philip, his wife and little girls. Pictures

him grateful that rich, powerful Americans like Charlotte and Manny Rogers came to his defense. Philip, running a clinic, not an inmate with a life sentence, filing appeals from a Georgia prison.

"Are you sure you have nothing else to tell me?"

"Charlotte, what could I have to hide?"

"I always tell Daddy you would not be fool enough to throw away everything for another woman," said Charlotte, studying a page of diamonds. "Would you?"

Manny closes his eyes, and shakes his head in answer to the multi-million dollar question. He hazards his own. "Have you heard anything about more murders?"

"Oh, I don't know!" she snaps at him and a chipped fingernail. "I never watch the news."

Manny, drifting into sleep, murmurs, "Bet Daddy would like that tuxedo dining service."

In Sydney, the Aussie customs agent opens Manny's passport and cracks a smile.

Unamused, Charlotte steels herself for the inevitable. "Say, Mate, is it really going to snow tomorrow?"

Joined by skycaps with suitcase ensembles in tow, the beautiful couple strolls to the airport exit, searching for the name "Rogers" scribbled on a signboard and held by one of the milling limo drivers. Charlotte is livid, out-of-breath, and struggling to keep pace with her husband. "When we get home, you must go downtown, and change your name so we won't have that scene at customs all the time!"

"I told you I'll get to it!" Manny snaps back as he comes to an abrupt halt.

"You Rogers, mate?"

Charlotte looks from the handsome limo driver to Manny. "No, this is Mr. T. Snow, driver," she said, and motions the skycap to bring her luggage cart around to the

limousine.

"All right, all right, all right!" explodes Manny.

Manny looks back at his luggage and plea bargains into Charlotte's ear. "As soon as we get home, I swear I will take care of it!"

"Did you hear that, driver?" Charlotte pauses, as if sharing an intimate joke with the smiling uniformed stranger

"I believe I did, Miss," said the driver, tipping his cap to Charlotte and Manny. "Shall I get the rest of the luggage, then?"

"This time," says Charlotte, climbing into the limousine.

Manny slumps in the seat and studies his wife on the drive into the city. She is her old charming self in transit, appearing casual and unconcerned as she asks a flurry of shrewd questions, ever searching for signs of whatever Harmony Ruhl forecast from tarot reading to tarot reading and star map to star map. Charlotte leans forward and Manny shivers as a shadow of past and future come full circle in the plush town car.

"Why, Driver, I bet I can guess your sign."